









THE  
ANTI-TITHE AGITATION IN WALES.

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## P R E F A C E.



The object of the following pages is to lay before the public a statement of the case for legislative changes in the incidence and machinery for recovery of tithe rent-charges. Many controverted subjects are necessarily touched upon. But the question of Disestablishment and Disendowment is carefully excluded. The changes demanded by the clergy in Wales, and by Churchmen generally, do not affect the *corpus* of the disputed property. Their tendency is to simplify the issues involved in the existence of national Established Churches by the removal of unnecessary sources of passion, ignorance, and prejudice. They therefore appeal for support to all who desire an impartial verdict upon principles of vital importance.

The three letters deal with (1) the origin, growth, and procedure of the anti-tithe agitation in Wales; (2) the effects of the movement upon the clergy in Wales; (3) the legislative changes which it is proposed to apply as remedies. The facts and figures which the letters contain establish three points, as I believe, beyond all question. The clergy in Wales are reduced by the agitation to extreme destitution. They have not provoked resistance by harshness; on the contrary, their enforced reductions and voluntary abatements show a sympathy with agricultural distress which is remarkable for generous liberality. And, finally, they are practically deprived of legal protection against a movement that robs them of property which is guaranteed to them by law. On these three points the case for legislative change mainly rests. If they are established, further delay in the application of remedies is as cruel as it is unjust.

Severed from their original surroundings, and published as a pamphlet, these letters may, here and there, appear too uncompromising and positive in their language. I do not wish

to withdraw, or even to modify, any opinion expressed in the following pages. But had I written as a pamphleteer, and not as a Special Correspondent, policy might have suggested a greater show of deference to the convictions of opponents, where the topics under discussion admit of dispute.

In conclusion, I must express my gratitude to the numerous clergymen and laymen who have assisted me in collecting information, and especially to the Bishop of St. Asaph, the Bishops of Bangor and St. Davids, the Dean of St. Asaph, the Archdeacons of St. Asaph, Bangor, and Carmarthen, Mr. J. W. Dale, the Chief Constables of Cardiganshire and Carmarthenshire, and Mr. Sisson, the Registrar of the Diocese of St. Asaph.

R. E. PROTHERO.

## THE ANTI-TITHE AGITATION IN WALES.

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### I.—THE CHARACTER, OBJECT, AND PROCEDURE OF THE AGITATION.

No eye-witness can for a moment question the extent and severity of the suffering which the Welsh anti-tithe agitation inflicts upon the parochial clergy in Wales. Men are generally philosophers in the affairs of others, prone to consider that their duty to their neighbour is fulfilled when they bear his privations with patience. But it is hoped that a simple statement of facts may arouse the public to a recognition of the urgent need of legislation upon tithe rent-charges, and to a sense of the cruelty of further delay in facilitating their collection.

Speaking generally, it will be conceded that the parochial clergy of Wales are laborious and zealous in the discharge of their duties. The vernacular press, which is, with trifling exceptions, the mouthpiece of the different Nonconformist bodies, is venomous in its attacks upon the clergy as a class, virulent in its denunciations of the servants of "the Stranger" and "the Romish Beast," sensational in its descriptions of the battles fought in the so-called tithe war. But the bitterest enemy of the Establishment has not ventured to attribute the distress of the clergy to their own personal faults or individual shortcomings. Their only crime is that they are ministers of the Established Church, and in that capacity entitled to property of which the law professes to guarantee the enjoyment.

*Nullum tempus occurrit ecclesiae* was a maxim of the old tithe law, which worked unfairly against tithepayers. "*No delay injures the Church*" is the rendering of the maxim which the present Parliament adopts, without considering the hardships that delay inflicts upon titheowners. It is practically true that the parochial clergy are absolutely without remedy or protection against a lawless agitation, which deprives them of their stipends, and reduces them from comparative comfort to positive want. Distress is generally a relative term. Here it means, except in those rare cases where the Welsh clergy possess some private fortune, absolute destitution, the loss of bare necessities, and not merely painful privations. Those who suffer most

complain the least. Their chief solicitude has been to conceal their misery, not to proclaim their "bitter cry" upon the house-tops. Now and then chance expressions reveal the depth of their suffering and their reluctance to make it known. "So you have had a riot in your parish," said a friend to a country clergyman. "I did not think it was known," replied the parson. "Why, I saw it in the paper," said the other. "Ah! I have given up my paper," was the answer. Another clergyman was compelled by the loss of his income through the agitation to dismiss his servants. Their offer of remaining without wages was declined. "We felt we would sooner hide our poverty." In contact with a delicacy which shrinks from the touch of the most sympathetic charity, it is difficult to ascertain the whole extent of the distress and impossible to lay it before the public. It is literally the fact that not one-half the misery can be ascertained and told. Yet enough will be said to demonstrate the reality of the distress and the cruelty of further delay.

The clergy ask no favour. They demand bare justice. The simplification of the process of collecting tithe rent-charges and the consequent removal of misunderstanding and misconception are objects in which the religious opponents of national Established Churches ought to be as keenly interested as supporters of the Establishment. Upon so grave a question as disestablishment and disendowment both sides might well combine to obtain an unprejudiced, impartial verdict. There is no necessary connection between the maintenance of the Establishment and the present incidence of tithe rent-charge or the existing mode of its collection. Opponents of the Church in Wales may be fairly challenged to say whether they desire to snatch a verdict upon side issues and by appeals to ignorance and passion, or whether they will co-operate to disentangle the question from irrelevant matter, so that the essential point may be presented in its simplest form and decided upon the principle of the *ad referendum*. It is true that delay in legislation retards the progress of the Church, cripples the efforts of her ministers, and enables her opponents to use her present relations to farmers with fatal effect against her spiritual influence. Are these the motives which influence advocates of disestablishment and disendowment to resist any legislative changes that simplify the question in which they are interested, or remove the prejudices which distort the principle at stake? The Church can desire no stronger evidence of the character of her work, or the extent of her recent advance.

All who desire to see the substantial question impartially determined, if true to their principles, should combine to disentangle it from accidental irrelevancies. All who claim tithe

rent-charges as public money are equally pledged by their principles to put a stop to the present anti-tithe agitation. They are the very men who should be the first to denounce the appropriation of the fund by private individuals. On what ground can those who demand the application of ecclesiastical endowments to national secular purposes defend their devotion to the exclusive benefit of farmers who render no public service of any kind whatever? Farmers are not called to account for this "public money;" they are not asked to pay it over to any national trust; they treat it as income and spend it upon themselves. Yet this money, which they thus appropriate, is what Liberationists assert to be national property. If the end excuses the means, those who sympathise with the ultimate object may justify to their consciences the manufacture of an agitation by the wholesale bribery of a class. But the practical effect is remarkable. The character of the money is changed the moment it is withheld from the Church. So long as parsons do not receive the tithe rent-charges, the champions of "national property" are satisfied that it should be treated as private property. They even collect subscriptions to enable farmers to persevere in the misappropriation of thousands of pounds of "public money." Welsh farmers are conspicuous for their shrewdness. They put their tongues in their cheeks, and the money in their pockets. But can it be wondered at that the demoralisation of the Welsh conscience spreads far and wide? The present use of the money may be obsolete, mischievous, or inexpedient. That is a question which the Legislature is bound to consider. But if every individual is at liberty to defy the law, because the burden it imposes is, in his opinion, unjust, the functions of Government have ceased, and the State is in process of dissolution. Again, tithe rent-charges are, says the Welsh vernacular press, taxes. It is then as public taxes that it encourages farmers to withhold payment. Already at one anti-tithe meeting speakers have pointed out the strategic advantages which a wild and mountainous country affords for resistance to the payment of every form of public taxation. Thus the lesson is daily taught that for rights of property, whether public or private, there is no protection; that for the lawless and the turbulent there is immunity; that if men may not look to Government for justice, they may work upon its fears; that if it will not redress grievances, its will may be defied with profit and impunity; that if it is deaf to complaints, it may be overawed by violence.

The districts of Wales in which the anti-tithe agitation has taken firmest root are comprised in the dioceses of St. Davids, Bangor, and St. Asaph. Though the differences between North

and South Wales are strongly marked, I shall not adopt any definite geographical treatment. The information which I have received as correspondent of the *Guardian* has been given me, in most cases, with the strictest injunctions to avoid the identification of individuals. The broader the area the greater the secrecy. I shall, therefore, arrange my material under three heads—(1) the agitation itself; (2) its effect upon the clergy; (3) its remedies. The first point forms the main subject of the present letter.

On the general question of disestablishment and disendowment I am not concerned to speak. The point to be determined here is whether the hill-farmers of Wales are as a class inspired by the zeal of the Puritan and the Covenanter, or by shrewd calculations of pounds, shillings, and pence. Is the appropriation of tithe rent-charges by tenant-farmers, who have contracted to pay them, a religious impulse? Is hatred to the Established Church or love of money the motive? Upon the answer to this question depends the character of the agitation. Religion alone can render the movement respectable. In this connection it is perhaps worthy of passing observation that the money withheld from the ministers of churches is not bestowed on the ministers of the chapels. It is spent by the farmers upon themselves. While they appropriate to their own use many thousands of pounds of money formerly devoted to a religious object, they permit the debt upon their chapels to rise from 246,926*l.* in 1878 to 323,118*l.* in 1886, and allow their contributions to the Nonconformist ministry, to the Nonconformist Missions, to the Nonconformist places of worship, and to the support of the Nonconformist poor to decline sensibly and materially. If Welsh farmers are impelled to refuse tithe rent-charges to Established Churches by motives of religion it is a religion which begins—and ends—at home.

Speaking generally, the anti-tithe agitation is an artificial growth, assiduously cultivated by Liberationist orators and by the vernacular press. Among the individuals who have exercised the greatest influence upon the progress of the agitation, the most conspicuous person is Mr. Gee, a Calvinistic Methodist preacher at Denbigh. His paper, the *Baner*, which recently obtained a certain notoriety in England by its advice to Nonconformists at the time of the Queen's visit, is the favourite newspaper of farmers in North Wales. The extent to which Mr. Gee has succeeded in his own immediate neighbourhood (which, it may be mentioned, is agriculturally one of the richest in the whole country) may be illustrated by the following fact. The recoverable arrears of tithe rent-charges in four rural deaneries immediately surrounding Denbigh are double the arrears in the diocese of St. Davids, exceed the whole



amount returned for 1888 in the diocese of Bangor, and form between three-eighths and one half of the total arrears of the diocese of St. Asaph. It may, in fact, be truly said that the anti-tithe agitation of North Wales has, in the main, emanated from the office of the *Baner* at Denbigh. The original plan of a general movement to obtain the three F's was coldly received by tenant-farmers, or at least regarded as premature. Mr. Davitt's eloquence failed to galvanise the proposed movement into life. The way was already paved for an attack upon ecclesiastical endowments by the propagation of the Liberationist programme. Tithe rent-charges were therefore chosen as more vulnerable than rents, and titheowners were selected as the first, because the weakest, victims. But it has been openly declared in the pages of the *Baner* that disestablishment and disendowment mean only the capture of a position which will enable the campaign against rents to be inaugurated.

Circumstances favoured the commencement of the movement. In 1884-5-6 agricultural depression had for the first time seriously affected Welsh farmers. The fall of prices was the opportunity of the agitators. Those who watched the growth of the movement do not need to be reminded how the *Baner* inveighed against the injustice of tithe rent-charges, and fanned into a flame the smouldering agricultural discontent, till it was able to announce the spontaneous growth of natural hostility towards the payment. The organisation and pulpits of the chapels, aided by house-to-house visitations of Calvinistic Methodist deacons, backed by the inflammatory harangues of itinerant agitators, and encouraged by the promises of the vernacular press, spread the contagion from parish to parish. Local branches of the Anti-Tithe League were formed wherever it was possible. Board school masters, small shopkeepers, small freeholders, and deacon-farmers were the chief agents in the movement. In one case which has come to my knowledge, the principal agitator was a local money-lender, who put the screw upon his debtors to join the agitation. Threats, coercion, intimidation, were freely used. Here and there the agitators failed. In one parish, they were told by Liberal and Nonconformist farmers to do their "dirty work" in their own parishes. In another, the Nonconformist minister refused to pay his tithe; but his congregation decided that they would have no agitation there, paid his tithe themselves, and deducted it from his salary. The minister in question found it convenient to move elsewhere. In another, though the bell-man was sent round the market-place to summon the people to an anti-tithe meeting, the attendance was so meagre that no local branch could be organised. But such instances of failure were comparatively rare. Landlords were too weak, too indifferent, or too selfish,

to interfere. The clergy possessed no organisation, and never combined to act together. The temptation of pocketing the tithe rent-charges, whether they were "public money" or "taxes," proved irresistible to impecunious farmers, hard-pressed by falling prices. Even persons who were well disposed towards the Church could not lose the opportunity of escaping money payments. Farmers were undoubtedly hard hit by agricultural depression. Those who paid their tithes saw their less honest neighbours go scot-free, and it has passed into a proverb that men would rather be convicted of roguery than of poverty.

The most formidable weapons with which the agitators worked were the necessities and the ignorance of tithepayers. Small freeholders who had raised money to purchase their holdings or tenant farmers, occupying highly rented lands, clutched eagerly at the relief which the League promised. When prices were falling all round them, their conduct was extremely natural. Many of them, misunderstanding the principle of the Tithe Commutation Act, imagined that the corn averages worked unfairly because the grain grown on the Welsh hills is inferior to the produce of the richer soil of England. All the fallacies which obscure the true nature of tithe rent-charges were employed in Wales. In addition, many were encouraged to believe that tithes would be altogether extinguished. "Cawn ni'r degwm" ("We shall have the tithe") was an expression frequently on their lips. If now they are, as has been hoped, growing lukewarm in the cause, their coldness is due partly to the rapid rise in prices of agricultural produce, partly to their recognition of the fact that the charges they expected to abolish or appropriate, the agitators only desired to nationalise and apply to secular objects. Free education is not to country farmers the bribe which it is to the dwellers in towns. They are shrewd enough to see that, even when the whole 137,000*l.* of Welsh tithe is applied to educational purposes, the loss of the voluntary schools would mulct them of at least 100,000*l.* a year in increased school board taxation. Consequently, if the choice simply lies between the appropriation of tithe rent-charges to the use of the parochial clergy and their application to educational purposes, which will, in the main, only benefit urban populations, many farmers have already declared their wish to leave things as they are.

The ignorance and the necessities of tithepayers are, as has been said, the groundwork on which agitators have chiefly built. So long as the direct incidence of the charge falls upon tenant-farmers, it will be impossible wholly to remove their ignorance. Their necessities have disappeared. There is a slight improvement in prices of beef, mutton, barley, oats,



lamb, veal, beans, vetches, as well as a considerable rise in wool and butter. Hay alone has fallen. At the same time the prices of yearling cattle have risen 80 per cent. or even 100 per cent. in the present year; and it must be remembered that small farmers, who do not grow the crop themselves, rather gain than lose by the low prices of grain. Everything to which Welsh agriculturists look for tithe, rent, and wages, has risen. For the present at least, farmers cannot—and, to do them justice, do not—plead poverty as an excuse for non-payment of rent-charges. They therefore fall back upon the sentiment, assiduously fostered by the vernacular press, and frequently expressed by themselves, that it is unjust to compel them to contribute to an “alien Church.” Of this sentiment, wherever it really exists, I desire to speak with all respect. But various circumstances combine to render it extremely difficult to ascertain how far conscientious scruples are a reality, and how far they are a pretext.

The feeling of the injustice of compulsory contributions to an “alien Church” is grounded on no historical basis; it springs at the earliest from the breach of Methodism with the Established Church in the present century; it did not exist fifty years ago, and it is not shared by many of the real leaders of religious Nonconformity. All this is true enough. And, further, it is possible to contend that those who, inspired by this feeling, refuse to pay their legal debts, ignore history, lay the axe to the roots of property, treat contracts as waste paper, and assume the right of debtors to withhold payment from creditors whose manner of expenditure they disapprove. But no one can fail to recognise that, wherever the sentiment genuinely exists, resistance to the payment of tithe rent-charges assumes nobler proportions and a new dignity. Is it possible to believe that the feeling exists among recalcitrant tithepayers except in the most infinitesimally small number of cases?

One general fact must be borne in mind before the purity of the feeling can be accurately ganged. Chapels in country districts are, in a certain sense of the words, commercial enterprises. That is to say, numbers of the farmers have invested their savings in them. To destroy the organisation of the Church is to improve the value of investments which its continued progress threatens to depreciate. Apart from this general observation there are several circumstances connected with the anti-tithe agitation which are inconsistent with the purity of religious scruples. No doubt the agitation is wielded as a powerful lever for disestablishment, but the form in which it presents itself to the farmer is the opportunity for exacting extravagant abatements. The demand is for reductions of 15, 20, or 25 per cent. upon rent-charges

which, taking 1878 as the culminating point, are already reduced universally by 30 per cent. Impunity and the vacillation of the Government have now encouraged larger hopes. But there is scarcely a clergyman in Wales, who, if he had submitted to extortionate demands at the outset, would not have recovered his tithe, or who would not, if he even now offered extravagant abatements, receive a considerable proportion. So also resistance to the payment of tithes is not confined to cases in which they are held by clergymen of the so-called alien Church. Mr. Ellis, M.P., stated in the House of Commons that no difference existed between lay and clerical tithes, unless it was that the clergy deserved most consideration. Everywhere lay and clerical tithes are equally opposed. Radical laymen are obliged to distrain as well as Welsh clergymen, English colleges, or Ecclesiastical Commissioners. In one of the worst cases in North Wales, the ringleader of the recalcitrant tithepayers is a churchwarden and a communicant. Another fact is significant. A local grammar-school, supplying the very education to which the tithe is to be devoted upon the principle of nationalisation, is asked for 25 per cent. reduction, while the local clergyman is only asked for 10 per cent. The principal agitator in North Wales pays his tithe regularly, and as regularly leaves a small arrear for the sake of appearances. In the face of facts like these, it is impossible to suppose that "conscientious scruples" express religious feeling, or are anything more than the brass buttons of the farmers' pockets. And it must be remembered—and the fact is admitted and deplored by the Nonconformist press—that, speaking generally, Welsh Nonconformity has exchanged its old devotional earnestness for the bitterness of political partisanship. Parties are divided upon denominational lines. Every department of administrative or financial government is interpenetrated with political religion. In the vast majority of cases, the religious creed of those who use this argument of the "alien" Church is synonymous with the programme of the Liberation Society. A generation ago scruples of conscience drove men from the pale of the Church to work out their own salvation in the chapels. But they manifested reverence, and not hostility, for the "old mother." Now these same religious scruples are supposed to be the impulses which force men to use the tithe agitation without scruple to destroy the Established Church. Upon the question of tithe rent-charges, conscientious scruples are political interests, disguises which enable recalcitrant debtors to claim the crown of martyrdom, substitutes for the plea of poverty by which, in times of distress, hard-pressed tithepayers justified their refusal to pay tithes. Political animosity, falling prices, the ignorance of tithepayers, the immunity of lawlessness, the vacillation of

Government, the struggle for the value of pecuniary investments—these, and not conscientious scruples, are the real fuel which feeds the flame of the agitation.

Such a combination of motives affords abundant material for agitators. A local branch of the Anti-Tithe League is established in the parish, with the chapel, the politician, the preacher, the investor, and the vernacular press at its back, supported here and there by genuine, though ignorant, religious sentiment, and appealing, directly and universally, to the strongest of human passions—the greed of gain. How does the League proceed? The two following cases are selected out of many because the parson was, in both instances, a new-comer, so that the personal element is altogether eliminated. In the first case, the clergyman was called upon late at night by two preachers, who informed him that the parishioners had met, and decided to pay no tithes unless a reduction of 4s. in the pound was granted. The living was a small one; the clergyman had just incurred the expenses of removal to a new house; he had given up out of his pittance the previous half-year's tithe to the widow of his predecessor, and it does not detract from his generosity that she was not paid. He offered 2s. 3d. in the pound, but the offer was rejected; and for the last eighteen months the tithe-payers have, with few exceptions, withheld payment. In the second case, the clergyman was accosted in the market-place of the adjoining town by two of his parishioners, who asked him for the use of the schoolroom to hold a tithe meeting a fortnight later. He granted the room, and in the interval of grace introduced himself to his new parish. At the meeting it was proposed that no money should be paid to him, or to the local grammar-school which owned a portion of the tithe rent-charge in the parish, unless an abatement was given of 25 per cent. An amendment was proposed and carried that 25 per cent. should be demanded of the school, and 10 per cent. of the rector. Even with this reduction a large proportion were evidently determined to pay nothing. Distraint did not break down their resistance. It put an end to the rowdiness of lads, but it only changed active opposition into sullen obstinacy. In both these cases, it may be added, the properties belong to very wealthy landlords, who have made no attempt to assist the clergymen.

Wherever the anti-tithe agitation spreads, these histories are reproduced. The clergy have, as has been said, no remedy, and are absolutely without protection against the lawless confiscation of their property. This may seem a strong statement; but it is practically, if not literally, true. A man unfamiliar with resisted distresses, and only acquainted with the peaceful process, thinks that nothing is wanted but a recourse to distraint. He speaks with affectionate pride of the "rough-and-

ready" remedy. "By Jove! I'd distrain, and bring the beggars to their senses." If he lived in Wales I venture to think that he would not. The process is more likely to restore a titheowner to his senses than a tithepayer. Rough the remedy certainly is; ready it as certainly is *not*. To this point I return in my next letter.

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## II.—THE EFFECT UPON THE CLERGY.

In my last letter, all intention of dealing with the general question of the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Wales was disclaimed. The attitude of those who advocate that measure is perfectly intelligible, though it does not command the sympathy of many readers of the *Guardian*. But the growth of the feeling against the Church among those who head the agitation lies altogether outside the scope of the present letters. It is only with farmers who refuse to pay their tithe rent-charges that I am concerned. As a body the farmers were not hostile to the Church when the agitation commenced. They were at first influenced in their resistance by pecuniary motives. When they could no longer plead poverty as their reason for refusing payment, or demanding abatements, of tithe rent-charges, they fell back upon the plea of the injustice of compulsory contributions to an alien Church. Within the last year and a half a considerable number of them have talked themselves, or been goaded, into an active hatred of the Establishment. But as, in the vast majority of cases, this sentiment originated in the love of money, so, wherever it now exists, it is rather a political than a religious feeling.

There is, as I endeavoured to show in my last letter, little of the Puritan or Covenanting spirit in Welsh farmers, who refuse to pay their legal debts, whether their creditors are parochial

clergymen, Oxford colleges, local grammar-schools, Tory or Radical laymen; who put into their own pockets thousands of pounds, which their supporters declare to be "public property" or "public taxes;" who devote the money they withhold to the increase of their own material comforts, and not to the support and spread of Welsh Nonconformity. It is in the name of religion that the agitation is conducted. And in one point the name is not taken in vain. In ordinary warfare the laws of war are tempered with mercy, and the brunt falls upon the actual combatants; but religious wars have always been conducted with a relentless ferocity which spares no victims, however helpless. So in the case of this so-called religious war in Wales, it is upon the defenceless country parsons and upon the women and children that the agitators turn their guns. Those who consider the Established Church to be an odious, or even useless, institution are justified in protesting in the strongest manner possible against the application of funds to its support. But can any reasonable person doubt that, if this agitation were nothing but a *bonâ fide* manifestation of objections to pay tithes to an Established Church, it would not long ago have ceased, or that payment would not now be resumed, even if it was still made under protest? Every day now creates the suspicion that the money is withheld because Nonconformist ministers enjoy their vengeance for real or fancied wrongs as much as Welsh farmers enjoy the use of other people's money. Men who persecute on principle may not be amiable characters, but they belong to a different class of beings from those who persecute from revenge or for pecuniary profit.

If any one thinks this statement of the case too strong, let him consider, in all its bearings, the following illustration of the effect which the anti-tithe agitation produces upon the parochial clergy. A clergyman, who had been engaged for many years in a town parish, was recently appointed to a small country living. He came from a considerable distance, put his house in repair, and entered upon his new duties. His wife fell ill, and, after several months' illness, died. Protracted sickness, together with the expenses of entering a new house, leave little money in the purses of those, whose means are, to begin with, small. Ten days after the death of his wife, he was informed by his parishioners that they did not intend to pay him his tithe. Inexperienced in rural life, and broken down with grief, he was powerless to resist. He had no money left, and none coming in. Food ran short in his home. His two daughters, naturally delicate, fell into ill-health for want of nourishment, and died. To add insult to injury his parishioners sent him a box. On opening it, it was found to contain a collection of nameless filth, and on the top was placed the message, "We hear you



are starving. Here's food for you." Is it necessary that the "battle of religious freedom" should be fought with such missiles as these?

This is an extreme case. But, stripped of its pathetic accidents and its insulting savagery, it accurately illustrates the condition to which the Welsh clergy are reduced. Particulars vary with each case. Some clergymen have encountered more opposition than others; some have small, some large, families; some are bachelors; some have enjoyed good health, some have succumbed to sickness; some are young, some enfeebled by age; some have private means, some have none. It is therefore impossible to give any general picture of the privations, the mental anxieties, or the extreme destitution, to which the clergy are reduced. Many of them have dismissed their establishments, curtailed every expenditure which is not absolutely necessary, and in not a few instances are only preserved from starvation by the bounty of friends. Men, to whom no personal fault is imputed and whose merits are acknowledged even by their persecutors, have not only lost the means of assisting the poor around them, but are narrowly straitened in their own food and clothing. Their credit becomes exhausted, while the pressure continues to increase, and their arrears accumulate. The insurances, to which they looked for provision for their families, have been dropped. But the bitterest dreg in the cup is their inability to provide education for their children. More than one clergyman has told me, that what he feels most deeply is, that he has to withdraw his son from school or college. Such an interruption in education for the pursuits of life necessarily proves fatal to the best prospects of success in any profession. Many a boy, who is kept at home because his father's means are too much reduced to pay for his education, or who has been for the same reason withdrawn from school or college, is ruined for the whole of his future career by the effect of this agitation. The fact is the more galling to parents, because private means are so rare among the Welsh clergy that their children have only their brains to rely upon for their future livelihood. It would be easy to enumerate instances of distress; to detail the case of one clergyman who was apparently well-to-do, but took his boys from school, and, being pressed for the reason, said that he literally only had 1s. 6d. in the house; of another, who scarcely ventured into the village because he felt so acutely his debts at the local shops; of another, who had sold his carpet to pay his way; of another, who offered to sell his books to pay some diocesan official his fees; of another, whose son apologised for a hearty appetite by saying, "We have had no meat at home for weeks;" of another, who supports himself and his family by the produce of the two cows which he maintains on his glebe.

But perhaps I shall best convey to the English public some idea of the extent of the sufferings by giving the figures of a few illustrative cases, and I must once more insist on the fact that private means are the exception among the Welsh clergy:—

	Tithe due last Audit.			Tithes received.		
(1) .....	£101	9	3	£13	7	8
(2) .....	95	0	6	13	13	9
(3) .....	48	0	0	12	0	0
(4) .....	133	0	0	48	0	0
(5) .....	158	12	9	19	14	9
(6) .....	113	10	6	42	9	1
(7) .....	82	2	0	21	15	8
(8) .....	250	0	0	86	10	0
(9) .....	200	0	0	8	0	0
(10) .....	110	0	0	12	0	0
(11) .....	145	0	0	17	0	0
(12) .....	137	0	0	25	0	0
(13) .....	138	9	11	3	11	0
(14) .....	137	13	6	13	5	5
(15) .....	309	19	9	24	16	8
(16) .....	124	0	0	6	0	0
(17) .....	105	5	8	8	8	4
(18) .....	176	0	0	26	0	0
(19) .....	187	3	7	2	14	0
(20) .....	148	0	0	21	0	0
(21) .....	136	6	0	29	1	6
(22) .....	112	0	0	13	0	0
(23) .....	353	4	4	79	1	8
(24) .....	230	9	2	92	16	5
(25) .....	137	4	9	41	7	5
(26) .....	263	0	0	45	0	0
(27) .....	214	0	0	87	0	0
(28) .....	344	0	0	66	0	0
(29) .....	188	11	6	87	5	10
(30) .....	235	0	0	50	0	0

In many of these cases fixed charges upon the living swallow up the greater part of the money received, and, with rates and taxes, leave but a narrow margin for the existence of the parson. Thus, for instance, in case No. 8, the clergyman received 8*l.* 10*s.* Out of that sum he had to pay to Queen Anne's Bounty-office 21*l.*, and for rates and taxes 21*l.* 17*s.* 7*d.* Remembering that, as a rule, the sums stated in the first column form the only income of the titheowning clergy, the imagination may go to work upon the figures, given in these thirty illustrative cases, with little fear of exaggerating the picture of misery which it draws.

No immediate prospect of relief appears. The approaching winter gives reason to fear that further extremities are still in store for the clergy. One after another, clergymen have told me that they have almost ceased to hope for legislation; that they wish the Government would leave the matter alone, if it only raised expectations which Parliament mocked; that the succes-

sive failures of the recent Bills have given fresh encouragement to the agitators, who regard them as the earnest of further triumphs; that disestablishment and disendowment would be more tolerable than the protracted misery of suspense. In such a reverse of circumstances as the Welsh clergy have experienced, their wives and children have sickened from sheer want of food, and the men themselves, if they have retained their health, have scarcely the courage to tell them that better days are yet in store. An acute observer, intimately acquainted with the Church in Wales, with the language of the people, and with the country generally, expressed to me his fears that the clergy are becoming cowed and dispirited even in the performance of their spiritual duties. The fear is probably well founded. At least such a result is naturally to be expected. Yet my own experience on one occasion is perhaps worth quoting as an example of the opposite. An elderly clergyman, in one of the most isolated hill districts, has received from his living, in the year and a half of his present incumbency, barely enough to pay Queen Anne's Bounty-office and rates and taxes. I went with him from his house to see the church by a path through the vicarage garden, which was overgrown with weeds and branches of creepers. He walked with difficulty, and, on the way, apologised for the condition of the path by saying, "We hoped to receive money enough to get it cleared," and for the slowness of his gait by the remark, "I really do not get enough to eat." Yet this man was, at that very time, arranging to hold additional weekday Mission services during the winter months.

Is the distress of the Welsh clergy, it may be asked, greater than that of the English glebeowners in the midland counties a few winters ago? It is almost impossible to compare two conditions so very different in many essential particulars. The Welsh clergy are, for the most part, recruited from the farmer class, and their clerical incomes are extremely small even when they are punctually paid. The reverse of fortune is, therefore, scarcely so great as in the very worst cases in the midland counties, because the Welsh clergy are more inured to habitual privations. But, with this exception, the sufferings of the Welsh clergy are far more universal, intense, and trying to bear. The glebeowner was surrounded by landlords and other clergymen who were all his companions in misfortune; farmers and agricultural labourers, though their sympathy was perhaps painful from its outspokenness, were, so to speak, in the same boat with himself. But the Welsh clergy, with all the eagerness, enthusiasm, and sensitiveness of the Celtic race, are altogether deprived of sympathy and support. They are isolated from their clerical neighbours in the remote and scattered parishes of a mountainous country; there are scarcely any resident gentry



in the highlands; they hardly see the face of a man who has not been induced to join in the lawless agitation of which they are the victims; their self-respect is wounded to the quick by the debts they have been forced to contract in the shops of the village; they are held up to public opprobrium by agitators who belong to the same class from which they themselves are sprung; the hands that refuse them food are the hands of their brothers. As I walked on a dull November evening through one of these desolate hill parishes, seven miles from the nearest town and railway station, and reviewed in my mind the position of the man I had come to see, it was difficult to think of his prospects in the coming winter—with a household menaced by sickness and narrowly straitened in food and clothing—without something like a shudder.

Perhaps it may be suggested that the clergy are personally to blame for these conditions. It may be asked, "Did they not insist too strictly on their legal rights in the first instance?" or, "Why don't they now distrain?" I propose to answer these two questions in their order.

Mr. Ellis, M.P., stated in the House of Commons that those clergymen who had met farmers with reductions of 5 to 7½ per cent. were cheerfully paid. This statement is a striking admission, from one who is peculiarly the representative of Welsh farmers, that the amount, and not the object, of the payment is what the Welsh farmer resists. So far I accept the statement gratefully. But my reason for quoting Mr. Ellis's statement here is to prove that, though it was doubtless true of the individual case or cases to which Mr. Ellis refers, it is, in its general application, completely unfounded. Before giving statistics upon this point I may make one observation. The point from which Welsh landlords calculate the amount of their reductions in rent or of their allowances is not the rental of 1836, but the *maximum* rental of recent years. So also titheowners are entitled to calculate their reductions from the years 1878-81, when rent-charges stood at 112*l.*, and not from the 100*l.* of 1836. The result is this. While landlords have on an average reduced their rents from 10 to 15 per cent. to meet agricultural depression, the Tithe Commutation Act has reduced tithe rent-charges, universally and in all cases, by 30 per cent., or double the average reduction made by Welsh landlords.

Besides this compulsory reduction of 30 per cent. in tithe rent-charges, very large abatements have been made by the parochial clergy. As I have flatly contradicted Mr. Ellis on this point, I proceed to give figures in proof of my assertion. The point which Mr. Ellis, presumably, sought to establish was, that the parochial clergy of Wales provoked resistance to the payment of tithe by want of sympathy with the struggle of farmers

against agricultural depression. The figures stated below prove the contrary in the clearest possible manner.

In the diocese of Bangor there are 142 benefices, and returns are before me from 122 of these benefices. In 8 cases there are either no tithes or none have been paid to the present incumbent. There remain 114 benefices.

In 41 cases there are no arrears, mostly owing to the action of large landlords who have paid the tithe rent-charges directly to the clergymen. In 73 cases there are arrears, ranging in amount from 20*l.* (for 1888 only) to very small sums. In 56 cases no abatements of a general character were made, but in considerably more than half of these instances the immunity from abatements as well as from arrears was due to the action of landlords who assumed the payment of the rent-charges. In 58 cases abatements were made—in 1886, 1887, 1888, and the first audit of 1889—though in many instances no abatements were offered, or asked for, in July of the present year, owing to the abnormally high prices of agricultural produce in North Wales. In 1888 one titheowner gave from 15 to 20 per cent., and, as a reward, his tithepayers owe him exceptionally large arrears; 22 gave 10 per cent., only 4 of whom escaped without arrears; 7 gave 7½ per cent., 1 gave 6 per cent., and 21 5 per cent. The remaining 6 gave various sums under 5 per cent.

In the diocese of St. Asaph there are 207 benefices, 23 of which have no tithes. Out of the remaining 184 benefices, I have analysed the returns of 172.

Out of 172 benefices, 44 have no arrears, owing, in the majority of cases, to the landlords having undertaken the payment of the rent-charges. The remaining 128 have arrears of different amounts. In 45 cases no abatements have been made, and here, again, the immunity is due to the action of the landlords. In 127 cases abatements have been made or offered in 1887, 1888, and 1889. One titheowner gave 20 per cent., with the result that his arrears amount to 21*l.* 5*s.* 2*d.* The remaining cases may be stated thus:—

1.	15	titheowners	gave	15	per cent.
2.	5	"	"	12½	"
3.	70	"	"	10	"
4.	16	"	"	7½	"
5.	14	"	"	5	"
6.	6	"	"	different sums under 5 per cent.	

Two rural deaneries in the neighbourhood of Denbigh contain twenty-five benefices from which I have returns. The figures work out as follows:—

1.	8	titheowners	gave	15	per cent., and their arrears	=	£791	6 <i>s.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>
2.	15	"	"	10	per cent., " "	=	£1,305	19 <i>s.</i>	9 <i>d.</i>
3.	1	"	"	5	per cent., and his	=	£118	0 <i>s.</i>	0 <i>d.</i>
4.	1	made	no	general	abatement, " "	=	£7	18 <i>s.</i>	2 <i>d.</i>

To sum up what has been said. The two dioceses contain 349 benefices, and returns have been analysed from 317 benefices. In 31 cases there are no tithes. Out of the remaining 286 benefices, 85 have no arrears; and 101 have no abatements. The immunity may be explained in two-thirds of the cases by the action of the landlords. In 201 out of the 286 benefices, there are arrears; and in 185 out of the 286 abatements have been made in the following proportions:—

1.	1	titheowner	has given	20	per cent.
2.	1	"	"	from 15 to 20	per cent.
3.	15	"	"	15	"
4.	5	"	"	12½	"
5.	92	"	"	10	"
6.	23	"	"	7½	"
7.	1	"	"	6	"
8.	35	"	"	5	"
9.	12	"	"	different sums under 5 per cent.	

Are there any other landlords in Wales, however wealthy, who have evinced their sympathy with agricultural depression more practically than the clerical titheowners, whose pittances have been reduced within the last ten years by 30 per cent., and who in addition have given back such large remissions?

These figures will, I think, prove beyond all question that the statement of Mr. Ellis, M.P., is, in its general application, calculated to give an entirely false impression of the facts. It may be stated, beyond fear of contradiction, that in no one case of real poverty have reductions been refused. At first the clergy attempted to decide each case upon its merits. But many of them have since been compelled to make general abatements to farmers who could, in numerous instances, buy them up over and over again. The men who have come off best are those, who have resolutely refused to make any terms with their parishioners, and experience proves that concessions have only stimulated the demand for larger and larger remissions. It may be true that, in individual cases, opposition has been created by too strict an adherence to legal rights or exasperated by personal feeling. I certainly encountered one clergyman to whom it would have been a pleasure to refuse payment, and it is difficult to praise the prudence of the titheowner in the following transaction. A clergyman issued the statutory notice of his intention to distrain upon the occupiers of land, out of which various unpaid sums of tithe rent-charge issued. The fee for this notice, which at law becomes part of the rent-charge, is 2s. 6d. On the receipt of the notice, the tithepayers offered payment; but the money was refused unless the fee for the notices was also paid. The result, was, that the tithepayers withheld payment altogether. Such instances, whether of personal unpopularity or want of tact, must necessarily occur among a large body of fallible

mortals. But as a rule, the clergy have acted with a patience and a forbearance which, from a worldly point of view, was, in the earlier stages of the agitation, carried beyond prudent limits.

There still remains the question, Why, when reasonable and even extortionate, abatements are offered without success, do not the clergy distrain?

Every clergyman is reluctant to disturb the peace of his parish by initiating legal proceedings against his parishioners. He knows that he probably will only inflame the agitation. The worst cases are those of the smallest tithepayers. A Nonconformist preacher owed some tithe, and refused payment. His pony was seized and sold, and Wales resounded with outcries against the monstrous tyranny. The amount which the debtor owed was 4½d. Whether the titheowner succeeds or fails in recovering his money, his spiritual influence is crippled, if not destroyed. "Before distraint," said a clergyman to me, "my parishioners were respectful and civil enough. Now they scowl at me like savages." Only dire necessity, or a strong sense of the duty which a beneficed clergyman owes to the trust estate which is his for his life only, makes the clerical titheowner resort to extremities. Supposing that he has made up his mind to distrain, formidable difficulties stand in his way.

The number of tithepayers is often very large, and the sums which they owe are extremely small. In one parish there are 300 tithepayers, in another 240, owing sums varying from 2d. to 1l. Even where the numbers are less inconvenient, or where it might be supposed that a few examples would reduce the rest to submission, insuperable obstacles prevent the application of the remedy. The costs of distraint\* which are allowed against the tithepayer, are calculated upon a scale which does not satisfy the expenses of a peaceful process, and are totally disproportioned to the outlay demanded to meet organised resistance. To carry out a distraint successfully, a technical training and long experience are needed. And it is quite plain, that, under the most

\* \* The statutory charges for recovering arrears of tithe rent-charge are as follows:—Scale 1. *Where the sum demanded exceeds £20.*

For levying distress—	3 per cent.	up to £50.
	2½ "	above £50, and not exceeding £200.
	1 "	on any sum above.
If a man is left in possession,	5s.	per day.
For advertisements,	the sum paid.	
Sale commission—	7½ per cent.	up to £100.
	5 "	on next £200.
	4 "	do. £200.
	3 "	do. £500.
	2½ "	exceeding £1,000.

Scale 2. *Where the sum demanded does not exceed £20.*

For levying distress,	3s.
If a man is left in possession,	4s. 6d. per day.
For expenses of advertising (if any),	10s.
Commission on sale,	1s. in the pound.

Where an appraisal is demanded of the distress, the fee is 2½ per cent. of the value as appraised, and the stamps.

favourable circumstances, the scale given below will not cover the necessary expenses of recovering arrears of tithe rent-charge, or offer any adequate remuneration for the work required. Supposing that the land from which the tithe rent-charge arises is situated close to the office of the distraining agent, supposing that no hotel, posting, or travelling expenses are incurred, that no clerk is required to accompany the agent, and that there is no active and general opposition to the process, it is probable that the additional expenses of recovering a sum not exceeding 20*l.* would be scarcely less than three guineas. And the whole of this extra cost, over and above scale 2, must be borne by the titheowner. On the other hand, if the conditions are unfavourable, if there is determined opposition to the legal process of distraint led by skilful legal advisers, if the distance to be travelled is great, if a large staff of emergency men have to be conveyed in brakes many miles from the nearest railway station, if the owner of the property distrained upon renders the usual method of selling by auction abortive, the expenses are increased one hundred-fold. Take, for instance, the seizure of a rick of hay. The agent cannot sell the rick by auction on the spot; he must sell it by valuation and remove it. To remove hay in selling condition requires skilled cutters and binders, and the hiring of men, wagons, and horses. Yet the only costs with which the defaulter is chargeable remain those set out in the second scale, and the expense falls, practically speaking, entirely upon the titheowner. Welsh farmers are perfectly aware of this. They know that it will not pay the parson to distrain, and that, if he succeeds in recovering his tithe, he only wins a Pyrrhic victory which is more disastrous to the victor than to the vanquished.

A few instances will suffice to illustrate this point. I cannot believe that any good purpose is served by keeping the figures in concealment, or that similar items of account are not perfectly well known to the advisers of recalcitrant tithepayers. The publication of the costs of distraints cannot make the position of titheowners worse, and the figures form part of the evidence that the parochial clergy of Wales are entirely unprotected against the anti-tithe agitation.

1. Two small sums were distrained for, amounting, with the costs, to 7*l.* 3*s.* 8*d.* The titheowner recovered the money, but the additional expense to himself was 30*l.* His loss on the transaction was therefore 22*l.* 16*s.* 4*d.*

2. In August, 1886, 30*l.* was levied by distraint from five defaulters. The expense to the titheowner was 100*l.*, and for this sum the cows, pony, and furniture of the parson are pledged. These figures are guaranteed by the titheowner to be accurate, and his accounts are offered for inspection to prove their genuineness.



3. Twelve defaulting tithepayers were distrained upon for the sum of 56*l.* 5*s.* 8*d.* The expense to the titheowner was 29*l.* 19*s.* 3*d.*, and he had to return, by way of abatement on the sums recovered, 7*l.* 7*s.* 6*d.* Thus the cost of recovering 56*l.* 5*s.* 8*d.* was 37*l.* 6*s.* 9*d.*

4. In March, 1889, four distraints were levied for 63*l.* 17*s.* The money was recovered, but the costs to the titheowner were 41*l.* 10*s.*

5. Within the last six months a rick of hay was seized under a distraint for 43*l.* When the clergyman applied to the distraining agent for the balance of his account, he received the answer that the expenses were already 40*l.*, and that, when they were all estimated, the account would be against the titheowner.

These illustrations might be multiplied indefinitely. It is no exaggeration to say that, in hill districts, remote from railway stations, and determined to oppose the legal process, the expenses of distraints are so enormous that the so-called remedy is absolutely and entirely useless.

Nor do the difficulties of the titheowner end here. Unless he can procure an agent and bailiffs from London, he can get no one to act for him. Local men either refuse point-blank, or ask a ruinous per-centage which is intended to be equivalent to a refusal. Very few men will undertake so dangerous a task as the collection of tithe rent-charges, or will expose themselves to the jeers, hoots, and insults of a crowd of women and boys, to be drenched with boiling water, or to be pelted with rotten eggs, garbage, and stones. If agents are bold enough to confront these dangers and annoyances, recourse is had to intimidation of another kind. An agent was warned, that, if he continued to collect tithes, his house would be burned over his head and that of his bedridden mother. More often the intimidation is of another kind. The agent finds his business leaving him, and the significant hint is dropped that he would succeed better if he ceased to act for the parson. Assuming, however, that an agent is obtained, there is often difficulty in obtaining efficient support from the county constabulary. It is natural that the police officials should desire to keep on good terms with the country, and that they should endeavour to make peace between the contending parties. But the results are not always fortunate. Amiability in those responsible for law and order is a dangerous virtue. On this point, and on the riots which have taken place at distraints, I shall have more to say in my third letter.

### III.—THE REMEDIES.

In my first two letters I endeavoured to show how the anti-tithe agitation gained its footing in Wales, how tithepayers sat down to starve out the clergy, and how they, driven to desperation by hunger, either acquiesced in ruinous extortions, or commenced legal proceedings, obtained an agent from a distance, and attempted to recover their money by the still more ruinous process of distraint. Distraining agents may be passively or actively resisted. The following account of a distraint at Llandwrog is typical of a comparatively orderly distraint. It is condensed from *Yr Herald Cymraeg* for December, 1888, a Carnarvon newspaper which enjoys an extensive circulation in the west of North Wales, and bears a higher character than most of its competitors among the vernacular press.

It was known in the neighbourhood that a visit to a certain group of farms was expected from "the angels of the Church," and a crowd of women and children were assembled near the farm where the proceedings were to commence. On their first arrival the reporters were mistaken for the bailiffs. That error corrected, they were able to observe the next event of interest, which was the appearance on the scene of four young men, bearing a coffin with appropriate gravity and solemnity, and accompanied by horns playing a sort of "Dead March." The coffin, which contained an effigy of a clergyman clad in a surplice, bore various inscriptions recording the decease of parochial tithes, and the "end of oppression for the land of Cambria." Shortly after the arrival of the coffin, the distraining agent was seen approaching the farm, accompanied by the Chief Constable, and two local policemen. The horns blared; the men roared; the women screamed; the children yelled; and in the midst of the din, the coffin was carried to meet the agent, and then headed the procession towards the farm. At the same time a lad took up his place at the car of Mr. Carter, the agent, with a horn, which he blew till his face grew double its natural size. Throughout the day, wherever Mr. Carter moved, there was the lad with his horn, pursuing him like some hideous nightmare. In the midst of an uproar and shouting which is described as intolerable, the agent proceeded to his business. In order to procure silence among the people while the auction was conducted,

the Chief Constable made them a speech. He is reported to have spoken as follows:—

“You have come here to express your sympathy with the farmer, and to protest against injustice. You have a perfect right to do this, if only you keep within legal bounds. I am here because I am responsible that those who carry out the law shall be enabled to do so peacefully. I have come here with only two constables of the neighbourhood, and I ask you to meet me in the same spirit. You have begun splendidly. Let me hope that the business will be carried out peacefully, and that you will not disturb the auctioneer too much. And, considering the unpleasant task he has to perform, I hope you will give him all fair play.”

Three cheers were given for the Chief Constable at the conclusion of this speech. As soon as the business was concluded, the agent proceeded to another farm. The coffin led the way, and the procession, reinforced by another effigy of a clergyman, followed. Mr. Carter entered the tenant's house to attempt a compromise. His efforts were useless. As he made his way to the rick-yard, some of the bystanders threw water over him, and as soon as he took up his place to sell, the lad with his horn was at his ear, and never ceased blowing till he had concluded his business. On the way to the next farm the coffin was followed by a donkey, ridden by a child in a surplice. The donkey seemed conscious of the solemnity of the occasion, perhaps attracted by the turnip that formed the head of “Person Degwm” in the coffin, for it followed with the most decorous pertinacity. At this farm the tenant asked for 10 per cent. reduction. But the auction proceeded, the lad being again black in the face with his efforts on the horn, and his instrument being drowned by the general uproar. Affairs looked threatening, and an attempt was made to hustle Mr. Carter. But the Chief Constable appealed to the crowd to give Mr. Carter “fair play,” saying “they might shout if they liked, only they must not lay hands on any one.” The hint was at once taken, and a din was raised which was said to be indescribable and which promised to be interminable. When silence was for a moment restored, the Chief Constable thanked the crowd for taking his hint about the shouting, and his remarks were received with great laughter. Meanwhile, eggs were thrown at Mr. Carter, and some struck him. Something was also thrust down his back, which annoyed him as if it was the “itch.” With these and similar interruptions, the agent effected his distraints upon four farms. At the conclusion, the Chief Constable thanked the people for the way in which they had behaved, and received three hearty cheers. He was followed by Mr. Carter, who also thanked the people for the kind way in which they had treated him during his discharge of an unpleasant duty. The proceedings ended with a luncheon, at which the Chief Constable, the agent, and others were



hospitably entertained by one of the tenants on whom the distress was levied.

This account of a peaceful distraint is typical of its class. It illustrates the discomfort and annoyance to which distraining agents are exposed, as well as the attitude which guardians of order adopt towards the movement. But the attendant circumstances necessarily vary. Sometimes well-known Welsh hymns, like "Caer Salem," are sung to give the proceedings a religious character. Sometimes the clergyman or the Bishop of the diocese is burned or drowned, or both drowned and burned, in effigy. Sometimes scandalous acts of blasphemy or indecency are perpetrated. Thus the Sacraments have been grossly travestied, and on one occasion women behaved towards the clerical effigy with filthy indecencies, and prolonged the exhibition without interruption from two Nonconformist preachers, who were watching the proceedings. At these comparatively peaceful gatherings, the rowdyism was generally the work of boys. The distraint was made the occasion for a general holiday and an abundance of rude horseplay. But farmers who have once experienced the nuisance of these tumultuous gatherings upon their land are not disposed to repeat the experiment. This holiday-making element in the agitation will, I venture to think, disappear. Its place will be supplied by sullen determination to pay no tithe rent-charges except under compulsion.

The presence of Nonconformist preachers at these gatherings is a sign of fair weather, their absence a storm signal. If they are present, no serious opposition is to be expected; if they are absent, "look out for a row." Such is the experience of one of the Chief Constables. From the loss which it entails upon farmers, merry-making on a large scale will probably be abandoned at distraints. Nor is it likely that violent resistance will be resorted to in any number of cases. Under the present law, tithepayers have the game in their own hands, without risking cracked heads. But on several occasions serious consequences resulted from active opposition to distraints. The following case occurred in South Wales. A strong body of police accompanied the distraining agent to assist in the recovery of tithe rent-charges. At the first farm they disarmed seventeen men of pitchforks, and subsequent events proved the wisdom of the action. In each case the pitchforks could only be captured by knocking down the bearer. In one instance, a man, when disarmed of his pitchfork, drew his knife. As the agent was making his way to the next farm through a narrow lane, with a high fence on either side, he and the police were attacked by showers of stones. Their position became so serious that the police were compelled to charge the hedges, which were lined on either side by men armed with sticks. Fortunately for the distraining party, the sticks were too long,

and the police were able to get under them. A short but desperate struggle followed. One policeman was felled, and while he lay upon the ground, four men beat him about the head as though he were a rattlesnake. It is doubtful whether he will ever entirely recover. Finally the rioters were routed, but they fought, as an inspector who was present told me, like savages, and did not give way till fifty had had their heads cracked.

Such scenes as these are not likely to be repeated. They certainly will not recur, so long as distraining agents are supported by a sufficient force. But county councils show a tendency to disallow the expenses incurred in providing police protection. In one of the Welsh counties, a man was seen armed with a sledge-hammer, and assisting the farmers in active resistance to the distraint. A few days later, the same man took his place upon the Police Committee of the County Council, whose duty it was to investigate the additional expenditure required to carry out the law. If the tendency to disallow expenses incurred in protecting tithe agents gains ground, the last shred of legal protection will be taken from titheowners. They will be left, literally as well as practically, without a remedy. For the present, however, passive resistance is adopted as the most embarrassing and the most effective course. Non-payment of all tithes except under compulsion is now the *mot d'ordre* of the Liberationist leaders. Mr. Gee has propounded the theory that the law provides two alternative modes of payment, one optional, the other by distraint. Law-abiding farmers are thus taught to consider, that they are only availing themselves of their legal rights if they refuse to pay tithe except under compulsion. To educated persons, or even disinterested persons of no education, the fallacy is sufficiently obvious. On Mr. Gee's contention, all the sanctions by which the law seeks to enforce a particular line of conduct are only alternatives. Every lawbreaker may therefore justify his conduct by the plea that he has only exercised the option which the law provides. But the theory is sufficiently ingenious to obliterate whatever sense of right and wrong may remain in the minds of those whose pecuniary interests prompt them to accept the interpretation, and the applicability of the same argument to rents has doubtless not escaped the intelligence of the Welsh farmer.

Upon the question of partial, or total, non-payment of tithe rent-charges North and South Wales appear to be divided. In North Wales, the most popular programme has hitherto been to withhold all tithe rent-charges, unless extortionate abatements are allowed. The plan has worked with success, for it has placed several thousands of pounds in the pockets of farmers, and has probably educated them for the more advanced movement which has been inaugurated in South Wales. The South

Wales and Monmouthshire Liberal Federation held a meeting at Cardiff on the 22nd of July, 1889. Their deliberations resulted in a new departure of considerable importance. It was decided to instruct Welsh members to resist with all the forms of the House of Commons the progress of the Bill to facilitate the recovery of tithe rent-charges, which was then before Parliament. At the same time, the official policy of Welsh Liberalism towards the tithe question was revolutionised. The Federation affirmed that the time had now arrived, when the movement against paying tithes, as a protest against their present application, should be made general throughout Wales, and that steps should be taken to assist farmers in withholding all tithes until the proceeds were devoted to secular purposes. To effect this object a *Farmers' Defence Fund* was opened, and subscriptions were invited by the *South Wales Daily News*. On the 9th of November the *Daily News* announced that the total amount of subscriptions to the fund received by them was 424*l.* 11*s.* The sum does not at present appear formidable, and it can hardly have realised the expectation of its supporters. The decisions of the Federation in July were circulated by the *Carnarvon Herald* in English and Welsh, and criticisms were invited by the editors upon the proposals, I do not know with what result. Representatives of the respective policies recently met at Llandrindod to concert a common basis of action; but it is believed that, at present, no agreement has been arrived at.

Other symptoms of disunion are manifest among the anti-tithe agitators. Some few Nonconformists of the older school do not sympathise with the aggressive hostility of younger men towards the Established Church. Others, who belong to the more advanced party, have protested—to their credit be it spoken—against the inhumanity with which the parochial clergy are treated, as a disgrace, if not a hindrance, to the cause of “religious equality.” Many men who, on religious grounds, are opposed to National Established Churches, have deprecated that subordination of religion to political animosity which characterises some sections of their associates. By many who contemplate the question from a party standpoint, the policy of the anti-tithe, agitation is condemned as a tactical mistake. “It is idle,” they say, “to agitate *now*, when the Conservatives are in office, because it is certain that disestablishment will not be conceded. Wait till the Liberals are in office; then, if the measure is refused, agitate with all your might.” In their opinion, the only effect of the agitation will be a Tithe Bill, which may strike the weapon from their hands, and, at all events, will render the work of agitators more difficult. Among farmers, the return of prosperity has here and there quickened dormant consciences. They once more make profits, and, feeling the pinch less acutely,

have resumed payment. But such cases are admittedly rare. Finally, miners and agricultural labourers do not, in many parishes, approve of the dishonesty of farmers, and express their opinions forcibly that they ought to pay their legal debts.

To point out these elements of disunion is one thing. To say that the agitation is subsiding is another. In its noisiest and most violent form, the agitation has undoubtedly subsided. But still waters run deepest. Welsh farmers have for the last three years kept in their own pockets the money of the titheowners; they have done so with impunity; and, if they no longer resist with violence, it is because they have learned to defy the law while doing nothing of which the law can lay hold. Meanwhile, in many cases, the scruples of the well-disposed have been overpowered by the profits and long immunity enjoyed by the disaffected. There is more terrorism, more combination, and better organisation. The introduction of the Tithe Rent-charge Recovery Bill has indeed produced a temporary lull, because the clergy, for the time, acquiesced in the terms of the agitators, or held their hands in hope of legislation. Now, however, they must either distrain, or forfeit the half-year's tithe, which will become irrecoverable by lapse of time. It would be rash to conclude that the agitation is dying because circumstances have made it dormant. Farmers know that they are masters of the situation, and do what they like. If they choose to withhold payment altogether they do so with practical impunity. Even those who intend ultimately to pay begin only to pay when it suits their convenience. Carelessness, delay, unpunctuality pass readily into actual refusal of payment. Honest tithepayers are taunted by their neighbours with their folly. Every sort of pressure is brought to bear upon them to join the agitation. Intimidation in this world and the next is freely used by their spiritual guides, who are often paid agents of the Liberationist Society. Public and private meetings are held frequently in the chapels to keep alive the agitation. Such men as Dr. Enoch Davies, in South Wales, parade the country collecting subscriptions for the "poor farmers." Tithepayers who hesitate to join the movement see their neighbours reaping the fruits of dishonesty; they are told, and the recent failure of the Tithe Rent-charge Bill is alleged as a proof, that their victory is won; they are asked whether claims without remedies, like those of titheowners, must not necessarily rest on bad titles, since the law cannot be invoked to enforce them; they see that funds are being collected for their defence and for their legal expenses. And if they resist social pressure, religious threats, and pecuniary bribes the voice of the agitators assumes a sterner tone of menace. Anonymous letters are circulated, of which the two following are specimens. The second has for Welshmen peculiar significance:—

“CAUTION!

“All who pay tithes are cowards! and all informers (*bradychwr*) had better look out!!! (Signed) “CAPTAIN MOONLIGHT.”

“NOTICE.

“All my daughters are hereby requested to be in Cardigan on Wednesday next to arrange matters. (Signed) “BECCA.”

In the face of all these facts, the calm on the surface is treacherous. Any combined or isolated renewal of attempts on the part of the clergy to recover their arrears of tithe would probably show that the determination to withhold payment except under compulsion is stronger than ever, since it has been increased by the action of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Federation, and by the inauguration of the farmers' defence fund.

There is no subject in the whole range of domestic policy which offers a wider field of discussion than the endowment of National Established Churches; none on which passions are more powerfully enlisted on either side. But, waiving all questions of the origin, propriety, or application, of the endowments, tithe rent-charges are a legal impost, legally claimed on the one side and legally due on the other. Under no conceivable circumstances can they become the property of the men who now enjoy their use by withholding payment from the lawful owners. The parochial clergy are, as I have shown, left entirely without remedy or protection against, what all sides must concede to be, a lawless confiscation of the property. The existing law has altogether broken down. The half-hearted efforts of the Government have hitherto only intensified the miseries of their position, till it has become intolerable. The Welsh clergy are entitled to relief in the name of humanity and of justice. Humanity demands their relief, because the agitation has deprived of their lawful income a body of educated men against whom, as individuals, their bitterest enemies make no accusation, reduced them to destitution and sometimes to absolute want, exposed them to extreme privations, stripped them of every luxury, cut them short even in the necessities of existence, broken them down in health, crushed their energies, forced them to drop insurances on their lives, compelled them to remove their children from school, driven them to sell furniture to provide food for their families. Justice, and, it may be added, commonsense, demand their relief, because, as things at present stand, the parochial clergy of Wales are practically treated as outlaws, precluded from asserting the commonest rights of property, although no charge is brought against them, and although nothing in their lives is alleged to justify their exclusion from privileges which every other subject of the Queen enjoys. The precedent of the tithe agitation against the Irish clergy in



1831-4 is often quoted by one side or the other in discussions upon Church endowments. Here it is only quoted to illustrate how keenly the House of Commons of that day appreciated the hardship of the titheowner's position under similar circumstances. In 1832, the House of Commons resolved to advance sums out of the Consolidated Fund to relieve distress caused by the agitation, and to recover the tithes as Crown debts from the persons by whom they were justly payable. Again, in 1833, the Government proposed an advance of a million of money in order, as Lord Althorp stated, to remove from the clergy the necessity of prosecuting defaulters for tithes in arrears for 1831, 1832, and 1833. The advance was to be repaid by a land-tax charged upon all tithable lands; but receipts for tithes were accepted as payment of the tax, so that it only fell on those lands from which no payments had been made during the period. The resolution in which this last proposal was embodied was carried by a majority of 230 in a House of 310.

Times are changed now. Relief in this form is scarcely to be expected in 1890, though the conditions are, on a less extensive scale, identical. Some remedy is, however, necessary, and will probably be conceded. What form will it take?

At the end of last session, the Government accepted an amended Bill, which embodied two legislative changes. In the first place, as an alternative to distraint, the Bill proposed to make tithe rent-charges recoverable, like other ordinary debts, in the county court. In the second place, the Bill proposed to transfer the direct liability for tithe rent-charges from occupiers to owners. The Welsh clergy are, it is believed, almost unanimously in favour of these two changes, and I only say "almost" because there are men, here and there, who deprecate any legislation whatsoever. If it should prove impossible to obtain *both* these legislative changes, and it becomes necessary to choose between the two, I believe the majority of the clergy would prefer the county court process to the compulsory transfer of direct liability. The Welsh clergy cannot afford to wait, for their position is already almost untenable. It is ill talking between full men and fasting. The less ground the Bill covers, the greater chance there is of its acceptance. But the conviction is daily gaining ground, that, though it is vitally necessary to obtain an Act embodying one or both of these smaller principles as speedily as possible, a larger measure is required to destroy the agitation, and that nothing short of a well-matured scheme of redemption affords the slightest prospect of a radical cure. Upon these points I propose to say a few words in conclusion.

The compulsory transfer of the direct liability for tithe rent-charges from occupiers to owners would confer an immense boon upon the Welsh clergy. It would also be a tardy act of

moral justice. Though section 80 of the Commutation Act of 1836 undoubtedly permits landlords to contract with tenants that the latter should pay the tithe, the clause is an evasion of the spirit of the bargain. It is evident from the debates upon the Bill, that one of the advantages, for which clerical titheowners made immense pecuniary sacrifices, was the severance of their existing relations to farmers of creditor and debtor and the direct payment of tithe rent-charges by landlords. Lord Grey, who was himself a member of the Cabinet committee upon the Tithe Rent-charge Commutation, has stated that payment by landlords was a term of the bargain, and in his own practice he has loyally adhered to it. Other landlords have acted, as they are plainly entitled to do, within their legal rights; they have kept the letter and evaded the spirit of their compact. During the present agitation, several of the largest landlords in Wales have undertaken the direct payment of the charge. In no instance has the change occasioned the slightest opposition. The tenancies are for the most part yearly, and in Wales, whatever may be the case in England, no difficulty is experienced in letting land at present rentals. A dozen candidates apply for every vacant farm.

The change is desired by the clergy and also by farmers. But there is no doubt that the transfer of liability is unpopular among a large section of landlords. Even to them, however, the change, apart from the imprudence of permitting their party-wall to remain on fire, would, in one respect, prove advantageous. At present they are necessarily unable to measure the exact length of tether which they can safely allow to tenants. If tithe rent-charges are in arrear as well as rents, the first charge on the security is the parson's. When both rent and tithe are paid by the landlord, there can be no charge prior to his own. But the dread that the transfer of liability may enhance the value of the titheowner's property at their expense, and the difficulty which has been experienced in obtaining tenants for farms, cause many landlords to resist the measure. No proof has ever been alleged that the transfer would raise the value of rent-charges beyond the point at which they stood before they were depreciated by a lawless agitation. The difficulty, if it be a real one, might be met by fixing the *maximum* number of years' purchase obtainable for tithe rent-charges issuing from agricultural land. Nor is the fear that, if landlords attempt to add tithes to their rents, the tithes will in the end be paid out of their own pockets, justified by recent results. Even in England the position of landlords has immensely improved during the past year, and farmers are no longer masters of the situation. In Wales, on the other hand, no landlord is confronted by any difficulty of this kind. Yet, in spite of praiseworthy examples, many of the worst cases in

North Wales have occurred upon the estate of large landlords, who own every acre in the parish. In one instance of pitiable distress, the landowner is a Churchwoman, but her resident sub-agent is a Nonconformist, and every farm is let to Nonconformists. Tithe rent-charges are still falling, while rents are once more rising. Yet if the transfer of liability would, on large estates, cause additional expense for clerks' work, the clergy would not, I presume, resist the payment of a per-centage in all cases in which it was demanded.

If all landlords assumed the direct liability for tithe rent-charge, the change would enormously diminish the area of the agitation. The Welsh vernacular press recognises this fact. It has already urged farmers to refuse to pay rent to those landlords who add tithes to rents. But, judging from the failure of the movement for the three F's, the advice is not at present formidable, and does not increase the danger of a "No rent" agitation. It may therefore be assumed that, in Wales at least, the change could be effected without difficulty, and that it would pacify many of the parishes in which the agitation now flourishes. But the result would necessarily be local and partial. The small freeholders, who own the lands they occupy, would be unaffected. Here no transfer of liability takes place. Some other means must therefore be adopted to protect titheowners from the confiscation of their property by small owners.

There is something to be said for some of the small freeholders of Cardiganshire and quarrymen of Carnarvon. Both classes have been carefully taught to believe that, if tithes could only be abolished as hateful contributions to an alien Church, their properties would become so much the more valuable. It is difficult to penetrate the recesses of the dark and silent minds of rural populations. But it seems probable that, at the time of their purchase, many of them were ignorant of the charge to which their land was liable. In Cardiganshire, a grievance admittedly exists which deserves special notice. And it seems to me that the same grievance, in all probability, lies at the root of some of the agitation among the quarrymen of Carnarvon, who have bought the small plots of ground which are occupied by their cottages and gardens. When estates are cut up for sales in very small lots, the liability to tithe rent-charge is often kept somewhat in the background, and very little care is exercised in apportioning the charge. In attempting to recover the money, one man is charged not only for his legitimate portion, but for the share of others also. Here is a complication which is prolific of resistance, and, if the charge is, so to speak, "sprung upon" the freeholder, fertile in hatred to the Established Church. The soil is prepared from which Liberationist agitators reap abundant harvests. At this moment, two estates, of which I heard, are about to be sold in



lots. If no more care is exercised in apportioning the charge, here are two fresh seed plots prepared for future agitation. At least the Legislature can check the spread of this particular evil by adding to the future Tithe Rent-charge Bill a clause, providing that, in all future sales of land, the rent-charge issuing from the estate should be first of all redeemed.

Though this grievance undoubtedly exists among a small percentage of freeholders in Cardiganshire and Carnarvon, it is not general nor even common. In the majority of cases the resistance of the tithepaying freeholder springs from his desire to keep the money, or his dislike to the Established Church. The transfer of liability from occupier to owner does not affect him, for he owns the land he occupies. He knows that the parson cannot venture to distrain, and that the law provides no remedy which can compel him to disgorge his lawless gains. It is against men of this class that the county court process is directed.

The principal points in which the existing remedy has entirely failed have been already noticed. But the whole law of distraint is hemmed in by restrictive measures favouring the party distrained upon. The scale of costs\*, which is allowed against defaulting tithepayers, is inadequate in the case of peaceful distraints, and, as was previously shown, utterly prohibitory where circumstances favour organised and determined resistance.†

\* See Letter II. and also sect. 8 of the Law of Distress Amendment Act, 1888 (51 and 52 Vict., c. 21).

† The following examples of the expenses of *peaceful* distraints in (a) favourable, (b) unfavourable, circumstances, illustrate the statement.

(a) Where the land, from which the rent-charge in arrear arises, is situated within ten miles of the office of the distraining agent.

(i.) <i>Where the amount sought to be recovered does not exceed</i>		
20 <i>l.</i> , say .....	£20	0 0
Notice of intention to distrain.....	0	2 6
Levy fee .....	0	3 0
Man in possession seven days at 4 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i> .....	1	11 6
Advertising sale .....	0	10 0
Commission on sale 23 <i>l.</i> , at 5 per cent. to cover all sale expenses.....	1	3 0
Total legally chargeable to defaulter .....	£23	10 0
Extra charges to titheowner—		
Extra fee, two visits at 1 <i>l.</i> 1 <i>s.</i> each .....	2	2 0
Extra sale expenses.....	1	0 0
	£3	2 0
(ii.) <i>Where the amount exceeds £20, say</i> .....		
£100 .....	£100	0 0
Service of statutory notice .....	0	2 6
Levy fee .....	4	0 0
Man in possession seven days at 5 <i>s.</i> .....	1	15 0
Advertising sale, &c. ....	1	0 0
Commission on sale 7½ per cent. on £107 to include lotting, portering, & delivering lots .....	8	0 6
Total chargeable to defaulter.....	£114	18 0
Extra charges to titheowner as before .....	£3	2 0

(b) Where the land from which the rent-charge arises is situated fifty miles from the office of the distraining agent, all the extra charges fall upon



brought before the county court. The name by which the court is known to the Welsh people is "y curt bâch," meaning literally "the little court." But "bâch," in this as in other cases, stands not only for "little," but implies a shade of contempt. To defaulters who have become impervious to the degradation of a summons before the county court, other arguments may appeal more practically. Certificated, bailiffs will no longer be permitted to refuse to act in distrains arising out of tithe. They will become officers of the court executing its judgments, instead of acting as private agents on the warrants of individuals. It is improbable that, under these circumstances, the same liberties will be taken with them whether they are levying, guarding, or selling distresses. Above all, the costs of the proceedings will fall upon tithepayers, and not on titheowners; the considerations which now operate to prohibit titheowners from initiating legal proceedings will henceforward operate to prevent tithepayers from risking a conflict with the law.

These are the chief considerations which lead Welsh clergymen to expect good results from the county court process. The remedy, if effective at all, will be universal in its application. Both tenant-farmers and freeholders will come under its operation. From this point of view, if only one measure of relief is to be accorded, the county court process is preferable to the more partial remedy of the compulsory transfer of liability from occupiers to owners. On the other hand, regarded as a means of removing prejudices or relieving the Church from unpopular relations to cultivators of the soil, it will do nothing. It may supply a means of enforcing payment of rent-charges; but it will not diminish the agitation. It is only when combined with the transfer of liability that the county court process will restore to the clergy that legal protection to which every subject is entitled, diminish the area of inflammation against the Church, and make life once more tolerable for the parochial clergy of Wales.

Time may well be taken to mature a comprehensive plan of redemption, to feel the pulse of the nation on the subject, to familiarise Parliament with the details of the scheme, to demand, and profit by, the criticism of friends and foes. But to embarrass any Bill, which embodies the two principles of the county court process and the transfer of direct liability, with proposals for redemption would be to extend the scope of discussion and risk the loss of the measure. That result should be avoided at any cost. A fourth failure would do irreparable mischief. The case of the titheowners has been stated without any attempt to colour the picture or to excite compassion by sensational descriptions. It rests upon figures which tell their own tale, and incontestably prove the need of legislative

change. No one can blame supporters of the Liberationist programme if they seize the opportunity of the proposed legislation to challenge a division upon the general question, whether or not the endowments at stake shall be devoted to the maintenance of the Church in Wales. But if they are defeated in that challenge, it may not be too much to hope that some of the opponents of the Establishment may co-operate with its advocates to remove an injustice which weighs heavily upon a class of their fellow-subjects, and to relieve from a state of destitution a body of men to whose individual merits they themselves testify.











